Developing the Professional Army Officer: Implications for Organizational Leaders

Lieutenant Colonel Craig Bullis, U.S. Army, Retired

ARMY CHIEF of Staff Eric K. Shinseki stated, "We are about leadership; it is our stock in trade, and it is what makes us different. We take soldiers who enter the force and we grow them into leaders for the next generation of soldiers. We invest today in the Nation's leadership for tomorrow."[1]

Shinseki recognizes that developing leaders is the core competency of the U.S. Army. Leaders are the most significant element of combat power and are necessary to fight and win the Nation's wars. Developing and conducting effective leader development programs is a critical issue for organizational success in the new millennium. Research indicates that leadership can account for up to 45 percent of the variance in organizational performance outcomes.[2]

Some believe that leader development should be focused almost exclusively on developing of technical and tactical expertise—the ability of a leader to motivate subordinates to engage and destroy the enemy. However, leadership doctrine portrays effective leadership as being much more.[3] Army doctrine identifies necessary interpersonal and conceptual skills as well as technical and tactical competencies. Today's effective Army officer must be warrior and peacemaker, thinker and doer. Leadership doctrine requires a focus not only on short-term results, but also on long-term requirements to improve the organization. The professional commissioned officer embraces four overlapping identities: warfighter, servant to the Nation, member of a profession, and leader of character.

It is now common practice for units to incorporate unit evaluation and assessment in their training. The Army should consider the same for individual leaders. Conducting individual leader AARs during training provides both the coaching that subordinates need and the support for those concerned about the risks associated with individual and unit failure.

Perspectives on Leader Development

The concept of leader development for a professional Army officer could be approached in several ways. The Army's institutional framework, outlined in Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet 350-58, *Leader Development for America's Army*, presents three pillars that support leader development: institutional training, operational assignments, and self development. Some scholars have recognized that the Army's commitment to this three-pillar model of leader development sets a high standard for professional development of the officer corps.[4]

A second perspective for approaching the concept of leader development is to concentrate on the individual. In other words, development should focus on how the individual should act to model behaviors desired in a professional military officer. These behaviors, discussed in Army Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership*, consequently propose a new set of behaviors here would be redundant.

These two models of looking at leadership—the three-pillar model and the leader as role model—are informative and important. They also provide a solid background for further discussion of officership.

By its professional nature, officership is owned

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by the Army's officers and is passed from generation to generation through the actions of those within the officer profession. The regimen of professional development within the Army has nearly always been formulated and passed from generation to generation by members of the profession itself—officers who recognize and act on the need to maintain a corps of professional officers.[5]

The senior officer's responsibility is to develop professional subordinate leaders in organizations. This critical senior-officer responsibility, to develop subordinate officers who understand and personally commit to the tenets of the profession, could be the most important task any officer performs.[6] The focus on the professional includes not only what the officer knows or does, but also who the officer is and how he or she embodies all the professional identities in his or her life. The leader's responsibility is to develop an organizational culture whose foundation embraces the officer's professional roles.

Personal and Professional Leader Development

Every leader has the responsibility to assess each of his or her systems to determine its relevance for the professional development of subordinate leaders. To develop subordinate leaders' behavior and personal identity as military professionals, scholars have proposed a model that includes challenge, assessment, and support.[7]

Development occurs in individuals when their established set of thoughts, ideas, and behaviors are challenged and found to be incomplete. Individuals, like groups and organizations, resist changing established processes until those processes fail to achieve desired results. These challenges provide the greatest potential for individuals to recognize shortcomings and move to greater levels of self-awareness. However, challenge itself is not enough. Challenge must be augmented with individual and unit assessments, the second part of a leader development framework. It is now common practice for units to incorporate unit evaluation and assessment into training. The Army should consider the same for individual leaders. Conducting individual leader after-action reviews (AARs) during training provides both the coaching that subordinates need and the support for those concerned about the risks associated with individual and unit failure. It is a truism that every good leader has failed at some point. Leader development requires that individuals and units fail to achieve goals and learn from the experience. A culture that develops leaders to be professional Army officers is much like a unit AAR, it improves by learning from both successes and mistakes.

The final component of the leader development framework is organizational support. To venture out of established ways of doing things, individuals must believe there is a safety net to catch them if they fail. Leaders in the developmental organization understand the risks associated with personal development and support those efforts with encouragement, counseling, and coaching. In essence, the organization's culture supports development and encourages it through the actions of the leaders.

Opportunities for professional development are enhanced when organizational leaders provide challenging tasks to subordinates, then assess and give feedback to those subordinates. At the same time, subordinate leaders experience the organizational support that encourages them to step out of their comfort zone. Leaders can use these important components as an integrating framework to provide a foundation on which a developmental organizational culture can be established.

Organizational Culture and Leader Development

Simply put, organizational culture is "the way we do things around here." Scholars describe culture as resulting from efforts to manage the organization's internal processes (how it operates to accomplish its missions) and the organization's external environment (how it responds to entities outside the organization: higher headquarters, sister units, or other el-

US Army

I Corps and Stryker Brigade Combat Team members go over battle plans at the NTC, 8 April 2003.

ements encountered on the battlefield). Because organizational leaders have managed these internal and external organizational challenges so well, the members of the organization have agreed that there are right ways to handle these challenges. As a result, leaders teach these "right ways" to soldiers (officer and enlisted) who join the organization. What they teach is, in essence, their culture.[8]

Leaders can assess a unit's culture by investigating what the unit describes as right or correct. In his 1992 book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar Schein describes areas leaders can use to assess the underlying assumptions of their organizations' culture. One could consider four assumptions as existing on a continuum with extremes at either end. Moreover, it is important to recognize that these accepted beliefs are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is through the interaction of each that the culture gains its power and influence in the organization.

The first assumption that helps to define an organizational culture addresses how the unit determines success. Is a unit pleased with its performance because it has met measurable standards, or do its members simply agree subjectively that the unit is good? Subordinate leader development might not be possible to measure quantitatively. The amount of numerical data the unit requires in its assessment processes is a good indicator of how units define success.

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A second assumption is related to how the organization views people—much like a Theory X or Theory Y approach.[9] In general terms, Theory X leaders believe that their subordinates are inherently bad; those subordinates must be externally motivated and closely supervised. Theory Y leaders consider their subordinates to be essentially good and internally motivated to complete tasks. Do the unit's systems imply that people are good and can be trusted, or do standard operating procedures tightly control behavior out of fear that someone might make a

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mistake? The amount of authority and responsibility that is passed down to subordinates can be an indicator of how the organization views its people.

A third assumption focuses on the organization's expectation of how people should act. Are subordinates expected to be actively involved in organizational decisions, demonstrating individual and unit initiative, or are they expected to wait for directions from superiors before they act? One area requiring organizational support might be when subordinates exercise initiative but fail to perform to an optimum level.

A final underlying assumption deals with how the organization expects leaders to act. Does the organizational culture expect leaders to retain power and direct action in an autocratic way, or are leaders expected to delegate to subordinates? As opposed to the third assumption that focuses on subordinate behavior, the focus of this assumption is on the control that leaders retain. The confidence that subordinates have in making unilateral decisions might reflect the organizational expectation of its leaders.

Each of these questions helps leaders identify the assumptions that members of organizations have about how they will do business.[10] However, it is important for senior leaders to recognize that the most effective culture for one unit might be significantly different from the most effective culture for another. What is important for leaders to remember is that the culture must support the organization's mission and objectives. If an organization's culture fails to support the unit's mission-essential task list, the leader has the responsibility to change the culture. If the culture is unsuccessful in developing future officers so that they embrace the professional virtues of warfighter, servant to society, member of a profession, and leader of character, leaders bear the responsibility to change that culture as well.

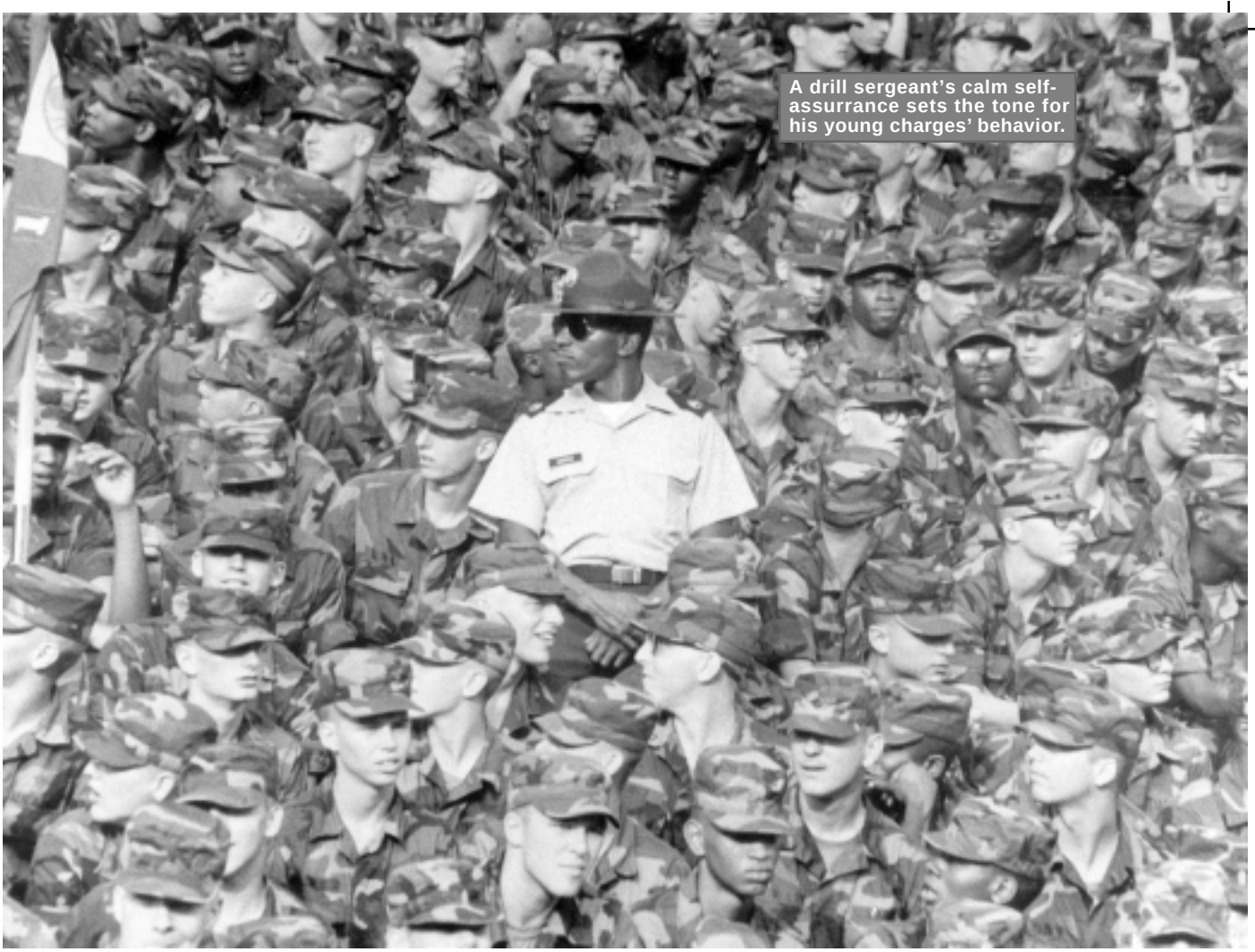
Managing Organizational Culture

As might be expected, culture is extremely powerful in influencing individual behavior. Because units have done things so well for so long, unconscious assumptions about "the right way" are solidly embedded in the unit. Modifying a belief about "the way to do things" is hard. Understanding and changing an assumption about why we do things the way we do can be much harder. Culture can be influenced through specific actions that leaders can employ.

Specific actions that a senior leader can use to influence culture include how leaders role model and coach subordinates; what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control; how leaders react to critical incidents in the unit; the criteria used for rewards; and even how new members are selected and recruited. To reinforce these direct actions, leaders might also be able to influence culture by the institutionalization of the stories, legends, and myths that unit members tell and by formal statements that organizational leaders make that capture their philosophy of how things ought to be.

Role model and coach. Officers are familiar with this set of activities because it is "leading by example." Subordinates watch what leaders do and imitate it—whether good or bad. How do you model being a warfighter? How do you demonstrate that your duty, your unit, and even the Army are more important than your career? You should begin with an objective self-assessment of your activities. Leaders should be involved in and support, both actively and passively, activities that strengthen the military profession. Moreover, leaders must coach people they work with to do the same.

Attention, measurement, control. Leaders control the behavior of subordinates by what they evaluate. The truism that "the unit always does well those things that the boss checks" applies to professional development. Paying attention to the warfighter portion is something we do well. We have tremendous opportunities through combat training centers (CTCs) and other training events to display and evaluate technical and tactical behaviors. To assess the servant of the Nation component might include tasks that are difficult to quantify. However, when a senior leader includes on his or her DA Form 67-9-1, *OER Support Form*, behaviors that reinforce each of these four components of officer pro-



A drill sergeant's calm self-assurrance sets the tone for his young charges' behavior.

fessionalism, chances are good that subordinate officers will do the same.

Reaction to critical incidents. While most subordinates consistently work hard to do the right things, soldiers of all ranks make mistakes. Some mistakes are more serious than others. Often, the leader's response to the mistake has a more lasting influence on the culture than the mistake itself. Leaders should make an effort to describe the errant behavior in terms of how it detracts from the profession. Does the behavior detract from individual or unit warfighting abilities? Does a selfish attitude reflect personal desires that are more important than service to the Nation? Do delinquent actions embarrass the profession?

In his article "The Subordinates," Mike Malone told about a leader who effectively engendered respect and commitment by his administration of punishment—linking the behavior to unit mission and goals.[11] Other leaders can do the same by using professionalism components as their basis.

Criteria for rewards. Subordinates respond to many forms of recognition: medals, certificates, and public praise. What we reward shows subordinates the activities that we value most. Appropriately, we recognize soldiers' performances after successful training exercises. We should also look for opportunities to recognize publicly other activities that support the profession. Subordinates are involved in many volunteer organizations: on-post activities, religious activities, and off-post community events that demonstrate service to the Nation as leaders of character. While this type of activity is not as easy to quantify and not as well known as training excellence, organizational leaders can positively influence a culture of professionalism by identifying and

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publicly recognizing those persons participating in important activities.

Criteria for selection and recruitment. Most Army organizations do not have the opportunity to recruit and select their own members. For those that do, however, they can use selection criteria that balance each important professionalism component. Leaders who have less control in this area, can still influence new members by establishing effective unit-sponsorship programs that teach the desired culture. Socialization processes affect two groups of subordinates—new members of the team and those who convey the culture to new members.

Stories, legends, and myths told by unit members. All organizations have revered heroes. Who those people are and why they are honored tell much about an organization's values. Soldiers have many heroes—Audie Murphy, Gary Owen, Molly Pitcher. Every branch has a patron saint—a person whose life (and often, death) epitomizes the professional nature of the branch. Teaching soldiers about these heroes reinforces the actions expected of an organization's members.

Formal statements that capture the leader's philosophy. What leaders choose to write in their leader philosophy statements is critical. Of the potentially thousands of items to write about, leaders must choose three to five that capture the essence of their approaches to leading soldiers. Commanders communicate that philosophy to every soldier in their units. Expressing that philosophy in the terms of warfighter, servant to the Nation, member of a profession, and leader of character sends a powerful message to unit members.

Development programs for future generations of Army officers should consider what is being developed (the attributes, skills, and actions expected of officers) and how it is being developed (the organizational process, or culture that facilitates that development).[12] To really develop a professional officer, organizational leaders must consider what a professional does (the content of what the Army believes is a professional soldier) and how professionals think about themselves inside the Army. Consequently, there are two different but related tasks. The first is to develop skills and behaviors consistent with professional expectations. The second is to shape leaders' thinking to see themselves as contributing members of the Army officer profession.

A powerful method for developing the behaviors and attitudes the Army officer corps needs can be gained from the management of organizational culture. Culture affects each of us, so much so that it can be hard to grasp or explain. We know it is there, however, because we can sense it. Senior organizational leaders who understand the power of organizational culture to manage developmental needs will be the most successful at developing the future generation of officers. They will be the ones who truly "grow them into leaders for the next generation of soldiers."[13] ***MR***

NOTES

1. Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki, "The Importance of Leader Development for Transformation" address to the 45th annual meeting of the Association of the United States Army, 12 October 1999.
2. David V. Day and Robert G. Lord, "Executive Leadership and Organizational Performance: Suggestions for a New Theory and Methodology," *Journal of Management* (1988): 453-64.
3. U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], June 1999).
4. James G. Hunt, *Leadership: A New Synthesis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., May 1991).
5. Leonard Wong and Douglas V. Johnson II, "Serving the American People: A Historical View of the Army Profession," *The Future of the Army Profession* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002): 59-76.
6. Noel M. Tichy and Eli Cohen, *The Leadership Engine: How Winning Companies Build Leaders at Every Level* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997).
7. Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
8. Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 2d ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 1992). A more recent version of this theoretical work is presented in a more user-friendly format, *Surviving Organizational Culture* (2002).
9. Douglas M. McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960).
10. Some might argue that what I describe is better termed "organizational *climate*." The theoretical foundation of this paper presents the leader behaviors as methods to change organizational culture. I will do likewise, recognizing that these same behaviors can be used to modify the climate, if the leader wishes. I intentionally use culture because it generally has a more enduring quality to it.
11. Dandridge "Mike" Malone, "The Subordinates," *Army* (December 1985): 16-25.
12. George B. Forsythe, Scott Snook, Philip Lewis, and Paul Bartone, "Making Sense of Officership: Developing a Professional Identity for 21st-Century Officers," *The Future of the Army Profession* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2002): 357-78.
13. Shinseki.

Lieutenant Colonel Craig Bullis, U.S. Army, Retired, is Professor, Behavioral Sciences, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University and earned his Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior from Texas Tech University. A former Field Artillery officer, he served in various command and staff positions, including Director, Leadership Research and Assessment Division, Center for Army Leadership; and Director, Tactical Officers Education Program, U.S. Military Academy.